

Colm McMahon and Caroline Buckley
45 Coolidge St.
Brookline
MA 02446

08-28-2016

Dear Zoning Board of Appeals,

Thank you for considering our views on the proposed development at 420 Harvard Street, Brookline, MA. We do appreciate the importance of provision of affordable housing within published guidelines and the work you do to assist this process.

The developer has recently made some changes to the proposal to address some of the concerns of the project, which is encouraging and appreciated. However, major unacceptable issues remain which if not addressed will impose an unacceptable negative impact on the abutting properties and on the wider community. Moreover, the proposed development still does not meet criteria laid out in the “Handbook: Approach to Chapter 40B Design Reviews”¹

Scale and height.

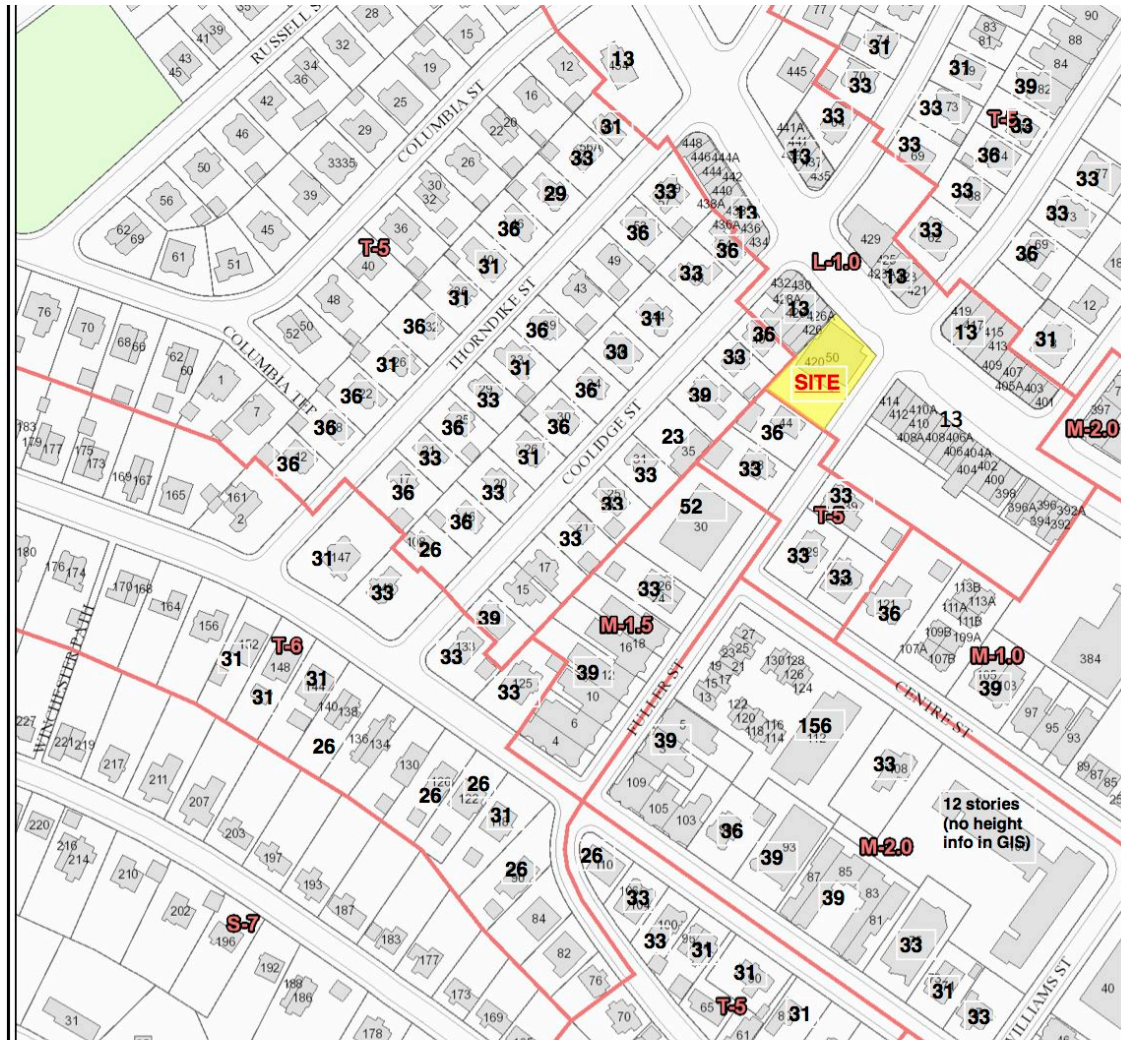
Handbook: Approach to Chapter 40B Design Reviews”¹ :

“Height – The height of the proposed buildings should generally be compatible with the surrounding buildings and structures.”

“Scale – The scale of a structure should be compatible with the surrounding architecture and landscape context.”

The proposed building is massively disproportionate in scale. The building abuts a commercial retail building on Harvard St., which is one story, as are the buildings on Harvard St. for an extended stretch of the street. The building abuts single-family homes on Fuller St. and Coolidge St. These homes are two and half-story buildings. The proposed six-story development would be totally out of scale and dwarf the adjacent properties. This major problem is a result of the request to waive the zoning restriction of 40 foot building height.

To assist your consideration of the scale of this proposed building in the context of the surrounding buildings, we include an annotated map of the nearby building heights from the Brookline Town GIS data below.



Loss of sunlight, and general light and air to abutting single-family homes.

The proposed building would block the sun from the adjacent buildings because of its excessive size, with an impact on quality of life, and solar energy gain. As can be seen from the images below, morning sun passes over the 420 Harvard St parking lot to our home on Coolidge St.

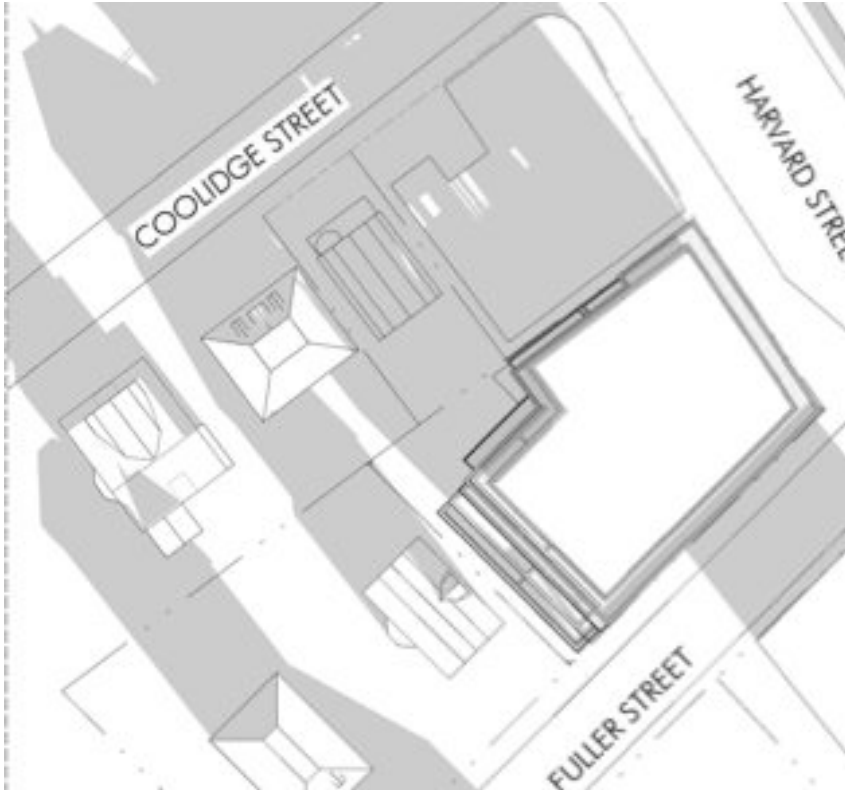


Morning sun on 3-19-16 – view from rear of 45 Coolidge Street



Morning sun on 8-25-16 – view from rear of 45 Coolidge Street

The sun is just above the level of the existing structure on 420 Harvard St. A building above this height would obliterate the sunlight to our home and in fact most of the sky. The proposed building would have a devastating effect on the passage of sunlight into our home and that of our neighbors. 24-hour shadow studies have been requested by the board, but not provided. In fact, the shadows will be so severe, that even buildings on the northwest side of Coolidge Street will be overshadowed as illustrated in the limited provided shadow studies (see below):



These effects are a direct result of exceeding Zoning By-laws of building height. **A 40-foot building as permitted by zoning would not have this effect. We urge the Zoning Board to reject this waiver request**, which is at the root of so many of the problems created by the project for neighbors and the wider community.

Inadequate setback.

Handbook: Approach to Chapter 40B Design Reviews”¹ :

“Compatibility of different building scales or sizes may be addressed through building typology, orientation, roof lines, setbacks, and the position of the building on the site. That is to say, the size of these elements relate proportionally to the size of the human body.”

“The treatment of rooflines, setbacks, and position of the building on the site may be used to mitigate differences in height.”

The proposed building has minimal setbacks and occupies a large majority of the site. This compounds the problem of this disproportionately large building, which will tower over pedestrians and residents of adjacent properties. The building still has as little as 8 feet setback from 44 Fuller St. Ms. Morelli, on behalf of the Brookline Planning Board, at the ZBA meeting of 7-25-2016, recommended an 18-foot setback as a starting point. Furthermore, the flat roof brings the full volume of the proposed building up to the roofline, contributing to the colossal appearance.

Open space concerns

The only usable open space is that of a small back yard of an existing single family home, now set to somehow service the occupants of 36 residential units – this poses noise and privacy concerns to us as our home and yard abut this space.

Privacy Concerns.

The removal of balconies from the plan is helpful, but this tall building will still tower over our home and yard, with our children now playing overlooked by multiple units of 420 Harvard St, instead of the private yard they now enjoy.

Denigration of neighborhood character.

The Brookline Comprehensive Plan² outlines the key elements of the town's future, preserving the quality of life and honoring the values that have made Brookline a unique community. It describes: *"The evolution of Brookline has given a distinctive character to the Town's residential neighborhoods and its humanly-scaled commercial districts."*

The proposed building does not respect the scale of Harvard Street where there is one story commercial building for not just the adjoining buildings but for an extended portion of Harvard Street. The design is supposed to be compatible with and sensitive to **Neighborhood character**. This proposal is generic and bears no relation to the neighborhood character. Part of the unique character of Harvard street, is that one story commercial buildings allow vistas over the units to the residential neighborhoods beyond. This is part of the unique character of the area, its human scale and feeling of community. As proposed, 420 Harvard would become the precedent that spells the end of the unique character and scale that is essential to the character of this area of Brookline.

To summarize, the current proposed building would cause unacceptable negative impact on abutting neighbors, on the residents of the town, on the character of the town, and also on potential residents of the proposed building. We thank you for taking the time to review these serious concerns.

Colm McMahon



Caroline Buckley



Local Building Scales – The proposed building is multiple times taller than neighboring properties.



Existing Structure at 420 Harvard St. One story street frontage in scale with surrounding buildings.



Abutting building north of 420 Harvard Street. Established one story retail store.



Next building on same side of Harvard St, south of 420 Harvard. Established one story retail.



View on Harvard St. One story street frontage as far as the eye can see.



Homes abutting the site, view from Fuller St. Single family homes on both sides of the site, in close proximity to boundaries, all 2.5-story homes including attic levels.

References:

1. Handbook: Approach to Chapter 40B Design Reviews. 2011. Available at:
<http://www.mass.gov/hed/docs/dhcd/cd/handbook-ch40b/handbook-approachtoch40b-designreview.pdf>.
2. Brookline Comprehensive Plan 2005-2015. Available at:
<http://www.brooklinema.gov/DocumentCenter/View/244>

Colm McMahon



Caroline Buckley

